

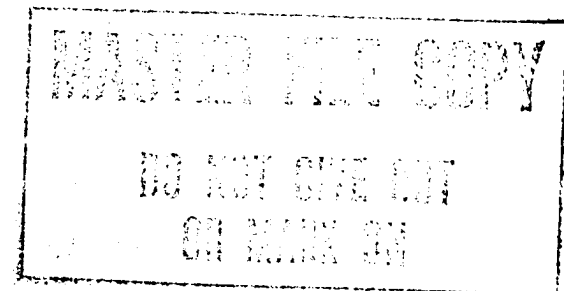


Belize: Major Towns and Other Important Features



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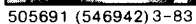
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February 1983

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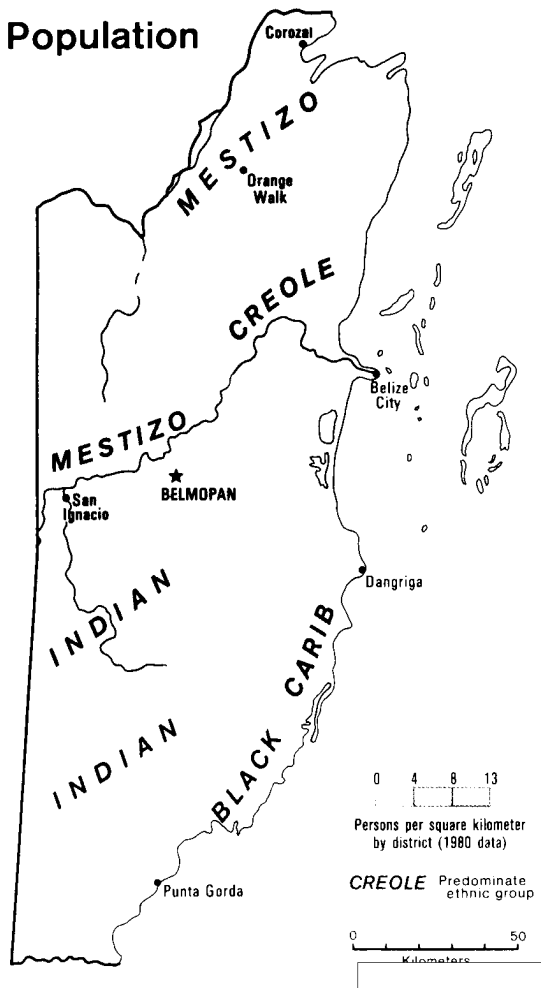


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Population



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the Belize River. Hot and humid, Belize City is sometimes isolated during heavy rains by flooding of the two roads that lead inland through swampy lowlands. It was devastated by Hurricane Hattie in 1961. The city's vulnerability to tropical storms prompted the government to build the new capital, Belmopan, farther inland. Nevertheless, almost a third of the country's population still lives in Belize City. Creoles predominate, but representatives of all of the country's ethnic groups are found there. Industry includes clothing plants, citrus processors, sugar refineries, fish processing plants, and sawmills. Large rice farms are found in the surrounding region. The Northern and Western Highways meet at Belize City, connecting it to all of the other important towns in the country. Belize International Airport and Belize City

Municipal Airport provide international and domestic service, respectively. Belize City's port facilities, once limited to lighterage, now include a new (1980) port less than 2 kilometers south of city center that accommodates conventional and roll-on/roll-off vessels.

Belmopan -D3- (3,000), capital of Belize since 1970, is situated at the country's geographic center, 80 kilometers southwest of Belize City near the Belize River and the junction of the Western and Hummingbird Highways. Its 55-meter elevation and interior position reduce the chances of damage from floods and storms of the type that frequently devastate the coast. Built in the forested foothills of the Maya Mountains, Belmopan has a hot, extremely humid climate with heavy summer rains. The name of the town combines "Bel," for Belize, with "Mopan," the name of a Maya tribe that resisted Spanish subjugation. Belmopan is a completely new, planned city. It includes modern concrete and masonry government buildings, water and sewerage facilities, a diesel-generated electric power system, and VHF radiotelephone services. Because it still lacks many of the amenities of Belize City and employment opportunities are limited, the new capital has not experienced an expected influx of population; many of the civil service workers commute by bus daily from the old coastal city. Planned expansion of Belmopan envisions accommodation of at least 10 times the present population. The broad fertile valley of the Belize River near Belmopan provides excellent opportunities for agricultural development. The region includes: Central Agricultural Farm, the country's principal agricultural research station; a pilot project involving rice, corn, and livestock run by Caricom Farms; and the large, self-sustaining Mennonite agricultural community of Spanish Lookout that supplies much of the country's dairy and poultry products. Many refugees from Guatemala and El Salvador have also established small farms in the area around Belmopan.

Benque Viejo del Carmen -E2- (2,600), situated along a swift-flowing branch of the Belize River less than a kilometer from the Guatemalan border, is the country's westernmost town and a natural smuggling center. The Western Highway passes through the town and extends to the border a few kilometers to the

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Belize: Major Towns and Other Important Features





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*Information available as of 10 February 1983
has been used in the preparation of this report.*




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Division, OGI, 

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This paper was coordinated with the National
Intelligence Council. 

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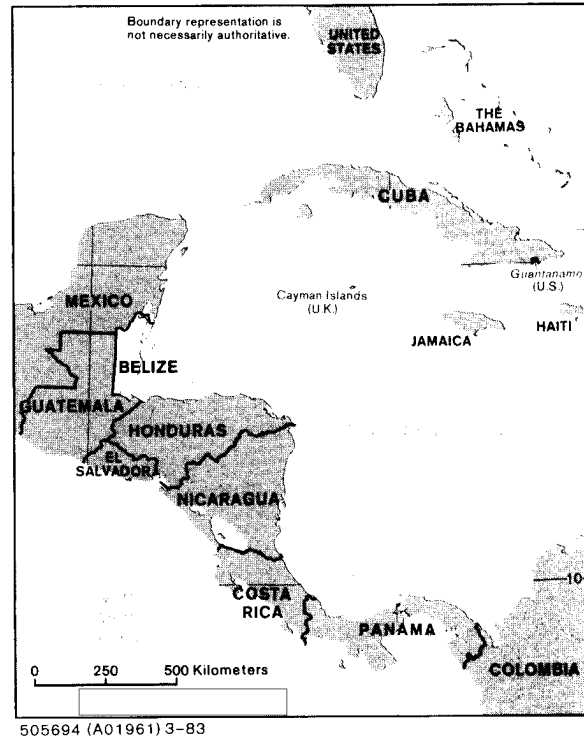
Belize:
Major Towns and
Other Important Features

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Belize (formerly British Honduras) is the second-smallest mainland country in the Western Hemisphere after El Salvador. It is smaller than the state of New Hampshire. With only 150,000 people—slightly more than six persons per square kilometer—it also is one of the most sparsely populated countries in the world. Besides its small size, the outstanding characteristic of the population is ethnic diversity. About 50 percent of the people are Creoles (of predominantly African descent) concentrated mostly in the urban areas, especially Belize City and Belmopan. Another 20 percent are mestizos (of mixed Indian and European, mainly Spanish, stock); they reside over a broad area but especially in the north. Indians (Mayas and related groups) make up about 18 percent of the population and are scattered through the frontier areas and the interior. About 7 percent are Black Caribs (descendants of escaped African slaves who intermarried with Carib Indians) living mainly on the coast. The balance of the population is composed of Asiatics (East Indians, Lebanese, and Chinese), who operate small businesses in the towns and villages, and North Americans and Europeans, including a sizable Mennonite community. There is no significant ethnically based discrimination or intergroup tension. English is the official language, but Spanish is also widely spoken.

Much of Belize consists of swampy coastlands and small cays (pronounced "keys"). The long barrier reef that lies offshore is surpassed in size only by the Great Barrier Reef of Australia. It is a major obstruction to navigation but also a natural feature with strong potential for the development of sport fishing and tourism. The Maya Mountains of southern Belize, although not very high, are rugged. Elsewhere, rolling hills and plains are suitable for agriculture. The north includes broad stretches of grassland mixed with palm and pine, while the south, which receives heavy rainfall, is covered by lush tropical forests. Hurricanes are a recurring hazard, especially along the coast.

Belize has no known valuable minerals or oil deposits, although exploration for the latter continues. The economy is based on agriculture (sugar, citrus, bananas), fishing, light industry, and tourism. Despite widespread urban unemployment and costly food imports, thousands of acres of potentially productive land remain virtually unused. A key constraint to development is the lack of human resources; the



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problem is perpetuated by the steady emigration of skilled workers (mainly to the United States) and a continuing antipathy of most Creoles for agricultural labor.

Populated Places

The six district capitals and seven other significant towns listed below are the most important urban centers in Belize. The population figures shown in parentheses were, with a few exceptions, derived by applying a 1.8-percent annual rate of growth to data from the 1980 Census of Belize; for Belize City we assumed a slightly higher growth rate. Figures for a few of the smaller towns, for which no census data are available, are approximations based on travelers' accounts.

Belize City -D4- (45,000), capital of Belize District, is the leading industrial, commercial, and market city and principal port. Founded some 300 years ago as a center for the logwood trade, it served for many years as the country's capital. The city is built on a swampy peninsula less than a meter above sea level and is divided into north and south sections by a branch of

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Territorial Dispute With Guatemala

Occupied and controlled by the British for more than 200 years (as a Crown Colony since 1871), Belize achieved independence in September 1981. Guatemala, however, refuses to recognize the new state. As purported inheritor of Spanish territorial rights in the area and because of British nonfulfillment of portions of an 1859 Anglo-Guatemalan boundary treaty, Guatemala has long claimed Belize as its own. Indicating a primary concern with obtaining access through Belize to the open waters of the Caribbean, recently Guatemala publicly reduced its territorial demands to Toledo District and the use of the Sapodilla and Ranguana Cays; in closed negotiations they indicated that they would settle for that portion of Toledo District south of the Monkey River. Belize offers transit rights but no territorial concessions. Trilateral talks between Belize, the United Kingdom, and Guatemala have been unsuccessful, and Guatemala has reiterated its claim to the entire territory. A squadron of British Harrier jets and a small force of British troops remain in Belize as a deterrent to possible Guatemalan military action.

Major Transport Routes

The basic road network comprises four main routes: the Western Highway (paved) from Belize City to Belmopan and the Guatemalan border; the Northern Highway (paved) from Belize City to Orange Walk, Corozal, and the Mexican border; the Hummingbird Highway (paved) from Belmopan to Dangriga; and the recently improved but still unpaved Southern Highway from Dangriga to Punta Gorda. Most other roads are unpaved, and many are unusable in wet weather. There are no railroads. The only airfield with facilities suitable for international services is Belize International (formerly Stanley) near Belize City. With a few exceptions, the 30 or more other airfields are small and unpaved—but even these might be useful emergency landing places for Harrier jets of the British defense forces in any conflict with Guatemala. A canal links Belize City to the coastal lagoons to the south; the Rio Hondo, New River, Belize River, and Sarstoon River are also navigable over portions of their courses by small craft.

Other Important Features

The Barrier Reef skirting the coast of Belize is one of the longest coral reefs in the world. Some portions protrude above the surface of the water to form cays, low islands of coral sand and rock covered with mangrove swamps, coarse grass, and coconut palms. Ambergris Cay in the north, separated from Mexican territory by a narrow channel, and the Turneffe Islands about 40 kilometers off the mainland from Belize City are the largest cays, but hundreds of others dot the shallow coastal waters. Practically all of Belize's fishing takes place among the cays.

The Maya Mountains, a rugged limestone chain, occupies almost a third of Belize. Notable peaks include one near the Guatemalan border that reaches an elevation of 1,160 meters—the highest point in Belize—and another that reaches 1,120 meters—Victoria Peak to the northeast. The mountains are densely forested and largely uninhabited. Lumber camps and a few small Indian settlements are scattered along their lower slopes.

The Belize River stretches across the entire country from the Guatemala border to the coast; its two principal tributaries, East Branch and West Branch, have headwaters in the Maya Mountains, with West Branch flowing into Belize from Guatemala where it is known as the Rio Mopan. In addition to serving as an artery for the movement of forest and other products from the interior to the coast, the river provides a rich alluvium supporting agricultural development along its banks. The lower course of the river and the delta lands at its mouth around Belize City are subject to flooding during the rainy season, June-December.

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is named St. Vincent after the Caribbean island home of their ancestors.

Hattieville -D4- (2,500), about 24 kilometers inland from Belize City on the Western Highway, was built as a temporary refuge for those made homeless by Hurricane Hattie in 1961. A new government-run Primary Health Care Center has been established there.

Orange Walk -B3- (8,700), on the left bank of the New River, is the capital of Orange Walk District. Originally a lumber camp, the town is one of the oldest settlements in Belize. The population is largely composed of the descendants of mestizo refugees from the mid-19th century Caste Wars in Mexico. Sugar-cane dominates the economy of the region, where the flat land is well suited to mechanized harvesting. A large, new sugar refinery is nearby at Tower Hill. Orange Walk is connected by the Northern Highway to the coast and by unpaved roads to small villages in Orange Walk and Corozal Districts. Several Mennonite communities, isolated from the rest of society, are south and west of Orange Walk. Narcotics smuggling has long plagued Orange Walk District, especially along the Mexican border.

Placencia -F4- (1,000), is a small coastal resort and fishing center at the southern end of a long narrow peninsula flanked by the Caribbean Sea on one side and a swamp-fringed lagoon on the other. A modern freezing plant and several freezer ships are operated by the Placencia Fishing Cooperative. Resort facilities are also being developed along the beach a short distance north of Placencia. The town can be reached by dugout or motor launch from the mainland or via an unpaved track from the north.

Punta Gorda -G3- (2,300), capital of Toledo District, is a minor port on the Gulf of Honduras and the southern terminus of the Southern Highway, approximately 25 kilometers from the Guatemalan border. The town serves as the market center for the area and as an export point for cattle and agricultural products, including bananas, coconuts, sugar, and rice. A saw-mill, a small boatyard, and a fishing cooperative are also in operation. The streets of Punta Gorda are unpaved, and the buildings are almost completely of wood frame construction. Electricity is provided by a single diesel generator; there is no municipal sewage

system. A small hospital is located in town. The port has a jetty that accommodates small coastal boats and a ferry that provides weekly service to Livingston, Guatemala. A small paved runway, frequently used in charter flights, is just west of town. Punta Gorda is inhabited mainly by Black Caribs whose ancestors arrived in the 1820s after participating in an unsuccessful attempt by Royalists to overthrow the new republican government of Honduras.

San Antonio -G2- (2,000), is a small market town in the foothills of the Maya Mountains in the interior of Toledo District. Practically all of the inhabitants are Maya Indians; many of their ancestors fled Guatemala to avoid press gangs. A government project is under way to develop local crafts into marketable products. Mayan ruins have been excavated a few kilometers to the northeast of town but may now be reverting to jungle. An unpaved road connects San Antonio to the Southern Highway.

San Ignacio -E2- (5,800), formerly known as El Cayo, is the capital of Cayo District. It is a center for the cattle and logging industries. A government project to develop peanut farming is under way in the rolling hills southeast of town. Most of the inhabitants of San Ignacio are descended from Maya Indian and mestizo immigrants from Mexico and nearby Guatemala. The Western Highway, extending to the coast from the Guatemalan border, passes through San Ignacio and crosses a large suspension bridge over a branch of the Belize River.

San Pedro -B5- (1,200), is the only town on Ambergris Cay, the northernmost, largest, and best developed of the string of small islands that lies along the coast. It is a popular resort and the site of a thriving fishing cooperative that exports lobster, conch, and fish. Coconuts are grown commercially on the eastern side of the cay. The population of the town has grown rapidly, jumping by more than 50 percent since 1970. The first automatic telephone exchange totally developed by Belizean engineers was installed in 1982. The town can be reached from Belize City by launch or small plane.

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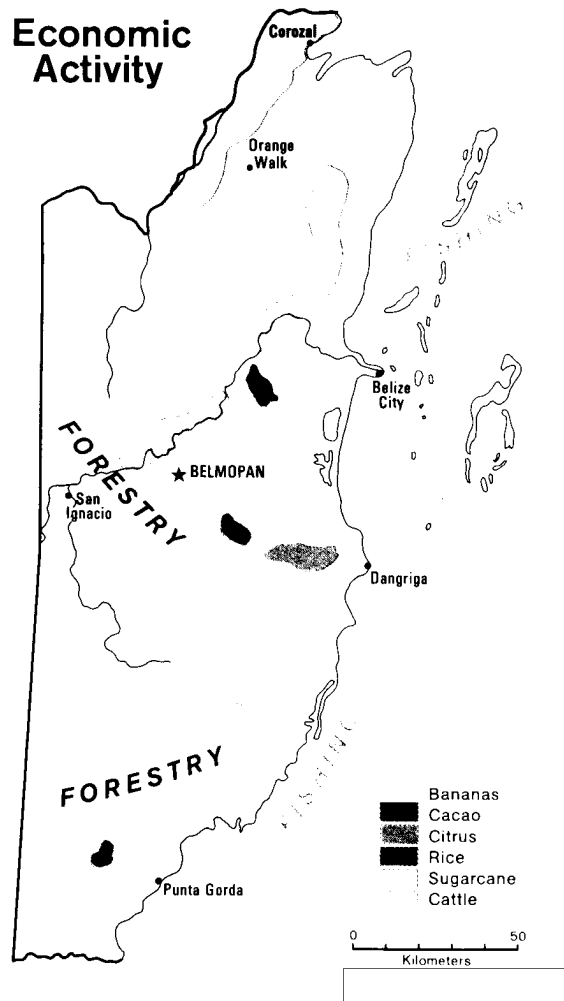
southwest. Most of the residents are Spanish-speaking mestizos and Maya Indians. Benque Viejo is unusually well planned and laid out, with orderly streets and public spaces, a modern water system, public schools, and a government health clinic. A natural medicine health clinic run by the Seventh Day Adventists is also nearby. The ruins of an ancient Maya ceremonial center lie a few kilometers north of town and attract tourists and archeologists; the top of one of the larger pyramids there commands an excellent view of the surrounding country, including the Guatemalan frontier.

Corozal -A4- (7,100), capital of Corozal District, is situated on a small bay opening onto larger Chetumal Bay. It is the first sizable town reached from the Mexican border about 25 kilometers to the north. Most of the inhabitants of Corozal are Spanish-speaking mestizos (Maya Indians with some Spanish blood), including many whose ancestors came as refugees from the Caste Wars in Mexico during the last century and others who immigrated from Mexico to work in the sugar industry after World War II. Corozal District is a center for sugarcane cultivation; experiments with mechanized harvesting are under way in the region, but most of the small farmers still use traditional methods. The town of Corozal was severely damaged by Hurricane Janet in 1955. It was rebuilt into a modern community with wide thoroughfares, parks, power and water services, and a government hospital. An old fort in the center of town still stands as a reminder of the days of frequent Indian attacks from across the border.

Cowpen -F3- (500), in the southernmost part of Stann Creek District, is the center of Belize's main banana producing region. An overhead irrigation system recently installed there is expected to increase banana production by providing year-round water and fertilizer. The system will be linked to other rehabilitated banana plantations in the area. This development, along with the use of fungicides, is part of the government's effort to revive Belize's banana industry. A short road connects Cowpen to the Southern Highway.

Dangriga -E4- (6,900), formerly known as Stann Creek, is the capital of Stann Creek District. It is located on the coast at the mouth of Stann Creek, a small river draining the northeastern flank of the

Economic Activity



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Maya Mountains. Once noted for its bananas, the fertile area near Dangriga enjoys an ideal climate and is now important as a producer of high-quality citrus fruit, much of which is converted to canned juice and frozen concentrate for export. The town was devastated by Hurricane Hattie in 1961 but has been restored and expanded to include a new water system, a power plant, a hospital, and several government buildings and other facilities. The recently reconstructed Commerce Bight Port (water depth about 6 meters) to the south serves as an outlet for the citrus production; further expansion of the port facilities is planned. Many of the houses in Dangriga, as in other low-lying coastal towns, are built on stilts. Most of the inhabitants are Black Caribs and the main street of the town

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